

## A View from the District (February 2010)

Immediately after sending off my last report I had quite a round of meetings, the first being a workshop on community aspects of the University's proposed site on the University Farm. A recurring theme through the morning was the importance of easy links between this site and NIAB which will house many of the community facilities (eg a library, a school). This is a factor which so far has been largely ignored, and I think some officers went away rather thoughtful.

You should have received through the door an update from the University on this project. Please do look at the details and contact the University's planning team – and please also tell me what you think since I am in regular discussions with both the University and the Councils, and sit on the body which will make the final planning decisions.

I had to brave wet snow and steady rain to a still-frozen Cambourne for a meeting of the Climate Change Working Group to consider how we should build global warming into SCDC's planning. After all the jokes about the weather there remains the grim reality. At present in our risk register climate change is a C3 level risk (*ie* likelihood: possible; impact: medium). We felt this is inadequate.

Council met on 28 January. Clarification was requested on the very confused discussion about removal of recycling centres last time, eliciting the embarrassing confession that the answer given had been wrong and they would (probably) stay in use.

A proposal to share services with Uttlesford DC and split the savings (supposedly £600K *per annum*) was withdrawn immediately before the meeting, amidst some confusion. Despite questioning the Leader refused to give any useful information as to why, and we meekly referred the issue back to Cabinet.

The rejected item from our last meeting was re-presented in minimally-revised form, and we had to suspend Standing Orders to discuss it. There was still a deep unease about handing the CEO a blank cheque – the proposal still had no figures attached – and we successfully imposed a cap on the amount he can spend on redundancy and early retirement. The implication is, of course, a reduced service for our most vulnerable residents.

We then discussed the Local Development Framework's Site Specific Policies Development Plan, a document forced upon us by a Government Inspector, which obliges us to permit developments such as the NIAB extra site because of delays to Northstowe. It was noted that if we refuse to accept it it will be imposed on us anyway, but several of us believe that such a deeply undemocratic approach should be offered at least token resistance.

A hardy biennial then came up: to replace the present voting system with an 'all out' system of just one election every four years. The reason for wanting the changes was given as a projected financial saving of £27K *per annum* over the next 4 years, but the projections were incomplete and rather dubious. The motion was defeated 41 to 10.

Corporate Governance met on 9 February. We received a report from our internal auditors which suggested SCDC are generally satisfactory if nowhere outstanding. We received the Audit Commission's annual Letter, which painted in parts such a glowing picture of our stewardship that I did not recognise South Cambridgeshire in it. The authors admitted that, for instance, they had not asked the chairman of the Scrutiny Committee before commenting on its effectiveness. We may hope for a little more rigour next year.

If you would like a fuller monthly report emailed to you please contact me at [scdc@de-lacey.org](mailto:scdc@de-lacey.org) and I shall add you to the list of recipients. If you have any District Council issues you would like to discuss please don't hesitate to ask me.

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